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'A CITY SET ON A HILL'

(MATT. v. 4)

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An Address

TO

THE ASSOCIATION OF LAY HELPERS

FOR THE

DIOCESE OF LONDON

*delivered in the*

NORTH CHAPEL OF ST. PAUL'S CATHEDRAL

ON

*MONDAY EVENING, JAN. 10, 1876*

BY

JAMES AUGUSTUS HESSEY, D.C.L.

ARCHDEACON OF MIDDLESEX : PREACHER OF GRAY'S INN :

ONE OF THE VICE-PRESIDENTS OF THE ASSOCIATION

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## ADDRESS.



‘A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid.’—*Matthew* v. 14.

I REMEMBER once reading a very remarkable allegory in which occurred the words, ‘It was the condition of that fortress that no assaults could prevail against it from without, unless treachery existed within.’ The fortress intended is the baptized soul. It is the soul of every one of us—the soul of each of you, my dear friends, and my soul. I say this most advisedly. Our cases and our courses, however apparently different or divergent, are made one by the following consideration. God’s Providence has led you to join an Association which places you to some extent in the position assigned by Christ to His Apostles, and, inferentially, to all who shall in any degree exercise their office to the end of the world. Glancing first at one of the hill-forts of Palestine, perhaps Sanûr or Bethulia, which is visible from the Mount of the Beatitudes, and then at themselves, He said, with a significance that could not be mistaken, ‘A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid.’ Such a city cannot escape some enemy’s notice. Let it be well seen to that everything within is sound.

You will not be surprised then, my dear friends, if, holding you to be of those whom St. John describes as 'fellow-workers (*συνεργοί*) in the truth'\* (3 John, v. 8), I have come to take kindly counsel with you this evening as to our common duties and common dangers. I am not, in strictness of speech, about to preach to you. Your presence and your acceptance of what is part of my special office rather preach to me. If you, whose callings are secular, are willing to turn your studies into the way of evangelising the dark corners of this vast diocese, to devote your hardly-earned leisure to it, and to make yourselves a pattern of good works, I am tenfold more bound to these things.

Let us, however, consider for a few moments both what the Association of Lay Helpers is not, and what it is.

It is not *merely* a revival of active functions on the part of the laity, which have been forgotten or become obsolete in languid times of the Church. It may be this, indeed, to a certain extent, for, as you know, it was till recently an error of society to regard the clergy only as the Church, and as the only persons who had to preach Christ; and preaching was supposed to apply to nothing but the delivery of sermons. But the Association is something fuller and deeper. It is a voluntary recognition on the part of the laity of their share in that spreading the Gospel which is divinely enjoined upon all.

Nor is it, again, *merely* an acceptance by its members of definite duties, confined to certain spheres or localities, neglect of which would expose them, as the clergy would be exposed, to ecclesiastical censure. This would be incompatible with the secular engagements of many. Some, indeed have enrolled themselves as members of parochial choirs, and so have discredited the opinion that the office of con-

\* St. Paul spoke of Epaphroditus as his brother, fellow-worker (*συνεργόν*), and fellow-soldier—epithets implying common sympathy, common work, common toil and suffering.



tributing to Church psalmody is a hireling or inferior one. Some have undertaken the office of lay missionaries, leaving their own homes in pleasant places to seek and to save the reckless and the well-nigh lost. Some have held night-schools for adult classes. Some, again, have devoted a large portion of Sunday to the teaching of children. All honour be to such men, and to others, who, in any such direct way, have helped Christ's ordained ministers. But *these* are helped as well by the knowledge that they have about them a body of laymen, ready, by occasional services of whatever kind, to strengthen their hands, and to act as leaders and encouragers when unexpected emergencies present themselves.

Nor, though the works of the members must be to a certain extent visible, and act upon others, was the Association formed *merely* for this. It was formed also for that society, and help, and comfort, which consciousness of union supplies. Not, indeed, that this is any new invention. The blessed doctrine of the Communion of Saints joins us in the design of Christ, through Himself, to all who are saved by Him, whether they be departed hence, or be still labouring here. The blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist, besides its other gracious strengthening powers, is a memorial and a perpetual reinvigoration of that communion. The Universal Church, the particular Church to which we belong, the diocese or parish in which our homes are situate, are, or might be, in their several ways, reminders that we are all members of One Body. But, alas! in a sceptical age doctrines and ordinances connecting men by faith with the unseen world and with its Head are liable to be forgotten or neglected. And it has been a lamentable result of the tendency of the population to converge to this great centre called London, that the diocesan and parochial systems have become weakened, and that men have been too isolated to be a support and help to each other.

Well, such a state of things gave rise to our Association, as an auxiliary to the clergy, as a bond of union between persons of all ages, all ranks, all circumstances, as an answer to the cry of some, 'What shall we do for Christ?'—to the cry of some, 'Where shall we find sympathy?'—to the cry of others, especially those who, being young, or without many personal friends, and with leisure on their hands, which they feared they might spend dangerously or unprofitably, said, 'Who or what shall save us from ourselves, and from the temptations which so easily beset us?' Let me add, that it arose as a natural response to some peculiar features of our day, besides those which I have mentioned.

For what is our day? It is one of rapid intercommunication of facts and ideas; a day of well-nigh irresistible combination; a day of disclosure of wants unfelt or unregarded heretofore; a day of opening-up of opportunities of usefulness to those who are thus made conscious of their latent powers and talents; a day of widely and deeply spread perception, that—

'He that made us with such large discourse,  
Looking before and after, gave us not  
That capability and god-like reason  
To fust in us unused.'—*Hamlet*, iv. sc. 4.

And, I will say further, it is a day of search, of earnest, intense craving, after what may raise not the individual, self-contained man merely, but the community, in the scale of being, morally, socially, intellectually, religiously.

Such, stated in terms broad, indeed, but quite definite enough for my purpose, are characteristics of our day. And, though as yet quite in its infancy, our Association endeavours to meet them. It is one of the 'many ways' in which 'God fulfils Himself;' that is, in which He stirs up the hearts of men to meet the contingencies of His Providence.

Several other guilds or institutions have sprung up of a somewhat similar kind, with their several good objects, which I need not specify here. Their names will readily occur to you. But our Association has its own peculiar office, that of making men realise their Church membership by actively interesting them in each other, and thereby causing their own views to be more truly human, because more divine. It is but right that, on such an occasion as this, I should tell you what I could imagine would be its working. I could imagine grey-haired men, who would assure me that since they have joined it they have felt a new life and reality imparted to the theory that we are all members one of another. I could imagine rich men who, seeing those who are not gifted with this world's goods, giving of themselves to Christ, have been moved to larger liberality out of their stores. I could imagine men of experience and Christian sympathies, who have found in the conferences to which it has given occasion the opportunities which they much wanted, but knew not how to obtain, of co-operating with their clergyman. And then I could imagine those who might have been left to themselves, unregarded, unelevated, unguided, amid the temptations which beset young men in 'this great, dim, wicked city,' and under which many fall, in the hours which early termination of business places at their disposal, and which necessary separation from family ties renders proverbially dangerous. And I could go on to picture them—what? As devout communicants, as deeply impressed with a sense of the preciousness of their bodies and souls as temples of the Holy Spirit; as content to spend their time in teaching little children, or in acting as readers to the sick and infirm; or in holding such mission services as their overworked pastors are unable to hold themselves; or in other ways adorning the doctrine of God their Saviour.

Nor is this merely imagination. I have many testimonies to the literal truth of these statements. I have known those in high positions who have gratefully acknowledged the blessing gained from the new sense of Church membership, to which they have been awakened by the fact of belonging to this Association. And I have known young men who, before they joined it, felt as though they had only 'to fight for their own hand,' as it were, in the battle of life; but who have, since they joined it, realised the truth that they are soldiers of Christ's army, strengthened by, and strengthening others by, combination. These have devoutly thanked God that they have not been left to themselves. If there are any such here, let me say to them—It is very meet and right that you should do so. O! (I repeat it with all the energy of which my heart and voice are capable)—O, ever thank God, on your bended knees and in your best moments, that you have not been so left; that what is good in you finds in this brotherhood an opportunity of springing up, what is bad is by it providentially let of development. Thank God that your brethren thought of your dangers, as young men, unbefriended men, and yet men embarked upon a sea which was likely to dash your frail barks against rocky shores already strewn with the wrecks of once goodly humanity. Some one who knew your case, and who had himself experienced desolateness amid crowded myriads, wrote well and sympathisingly :—

'He has a life small happiness that gives  
 — Who friendless in a London lodging lives,  
 Dines in a dingy chop-house, and returns  
 To a lone room, while all within him yearns  
 For sympathy, and his whole nature burns  
 With a fierce thirst for some one—is there none?—  
 To expend his human tenderness upon.  
 So blank, and hard, and stony is the way  
 To walk, I wonder not men go astray.'

And they were actuated by that man's spirit who called this Association into being, and sacrificed their own quiet and ease to induce you to join it. They were actuated, let me say it reverently, by a higher Spirit still—the loving Spirit of Him who gave His life for the world.

But I must not close without again placing my own case and yours upon a level. So frail and fickle are our natures, that even measures to which we resort for safety present new and peculiar snares to us. One of old, who mistakenly fancied that he could avoid worldliness by sequestering himself in a desert, found that he had still a world within, which was, if not more perilous than, yet at least as perilous as, the world without. So, though we of the clergy, and you of the laity, have taken upon ourselves new obligations to holiness and Christian activity—obligations which cause the eyes of our neighbours to be upon us—we are thereby exposed to dangers. We clergy incur the danger of placing ourselves in God's stead, of forgetting that we have a part in the confessions that we lead, that we want the absolution which we pronounce in our Master's name, that the advice which we urge upon others should proceed from a knowledge of our own hearts and our own hearts' failures and sins. So, brethren, it will be, perhaps it has been, with you. You have been, and you will be, tempted by your very familiarity with divine things to a careless use of them. The brilliant soloist in a choir may touch the hearts of others by 'He was despised and rejected of men;' *they* may be moved to goodly sorrow for the sins which caused Christ's death, while *the man himself*, having thought, through the preceding prayers, of nothing but of himself and of the effect which his voice and execution would produce, is but as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. A man may dilate to a class of learners upon the graces of the Christian life; but this may be rather from

a sense of what is expected of him, or of what it is decent for him to say, or from an effort of memory, than from an abundant store of personal experience, or out of the fountains of a renewed heart. A man may apply the Holy Scriptures with great force and propriety to the poor, to children, to the sick, to the distressed, to the dying, yet be insensible to their applicability to himself. These cases are not imaginary ones. Solomon's words prefigured them: 'They made me keeper of vineyards, but mine own vineyard have I not kept.' (Cant. i. 9.) St. Paul's words described them, for, no doubt, they were actually before him: 'If I give all my goods to feed the poor, and have not charity'—i.e. true Christian love—'I am nothing.' And this same writer's fears for their end are solemnly admonitory: 'Lest, after I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.' So our Lord has told us in the text that we are cities set on a hill, and that cannot be hid, and thus that our failure, if discovered, as it may be sooner or later, may pull down the truth with it, and discredit the doctrines which we have delivered.

There are few things under which people are more impatient than what are called 'talking good' and 'acting good.' By these phrases is meant, assuming a high moral standard of tone or conversation which is belied by what is commonly known of the talker's or actor's individual life, or by its forced and unnatural contrast to what has been going on. There are various reasons for this impatience. Men do not like sudden transitions, either from better to worse, or from worse to better. Though they will acquiesce in an unpretending, admitted superiority, they will not endure a spontaneous assumption of it, which is either unproved or more than questionable. It is almost irksome to them to be taught at all—the very position of a learner implies a sense of subordination—and they resent vehemently being taught by a

process which, like talking good, costs a teacher so little, or, like acting good, may have been put on for the occasion, and especially so if the teacher is one whom they suspect of having little or no personal belief in the truth of what he is teaching.

We have, then, my dear friends, to cultivate reality and earnestness if we would carry out our evangelising mission. We must be and do what we recommend others to be and to do. 'Come and do it,' not necessarily uttered, indeed, but implied, by one who throws himself into a work which he inculcates upon others, is always a more powerful incentive than 'go and do it.' The officer who leads his troops to a charge is obeyed with greater enthusiasm than he who assumes a post free from danger, and satisfies himself with issuing commands from thence. 'Therefore, I say, if you would influence your brethren for good, be real. *Be, do not seem to be.* What you do, what you say, though you do it without thinking at the moment of setting a good example to others, will affect them, though they for their part also are unconscious of being affected. Many a man has been stirred to heartier devotion in a congregation by hearing his neighbour's earnest utterances, and by seeing how his whole soul is intensely thrown into the service upon which he is engaged. Many a man has been brought to believe that the busiest life and the most intense mental occupations may leave a margin of time for works for God, by learning that one of our greatest lawyers devoted, year after year, a portion of his rest-day to teaching in a Sunday school.

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But how is this reality to be compassed? What are we to do? We are to keep our hearts, as I said at the outset, with all diligence; or rather, we are to pray, constantly and continually, and especially when we are upon any strictly

religious work, that God may preserve us from the sin of thinking more of ourselves than of Him and His glory. If any miscarriage befall us—and perhaps many do or will—let us look for the cause of it within. Most likely it will be found there, and not, as we are inclined to flatter ourselves, in external circumstances. I remember a young instructor of children once told me that he feared he was not making way with his class; that he found them impatient and disobedient. I ventured to enquire, affectionately, ‘Have you prayed for them, that they may bear with you; and for yourself, that you may bear with them?’ He admitted with sorrow that he had not done so. Well, the battle with those children’s hearts was at length won by him, as other battles of the kind, of every kind, have been and will be won, upon his knees. Let us, who desire to lead men to Christ, not be ashamed to confess how entirely we need ourselves His leading by His Spirit, His lifting up of our hands that fall down, His supporting of our feeble knees; and, after all, His clothing our poor imperfect works with the robe of His own righteousness. Amen.













